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ABSTRACT

Africans who were brought across the Atlantic as slaves never fully adjusted to slavery or accepted its inevitability. Resistance began on board the slave ships, where many jumped overboard or committed suicide. African slaves in South America led the first revolts against tyranny in the New World. The first slave revolt in the Caribbean occurred in Cuba, but the most organized revolts occurred in Haiti and Jamaica. The South American and Caribbean revolts were successful because of geography and, most importantly, because of African cultural continuity. In the United States, the African pursuit of liberty differed in various parts of the country, depending on the following factors: (1) conditions at the respective plantations; (2) relationships forged with American Indians; (3) the impact of the weather; and (4) contacts with Africans from the Caribbean. The emerging radical Black ministry set in motion several slave revolts in the first half of the nineteenth century. During the Civil War, many blacks fought on the side of the North. Following the Emancipation Proclamation and the "pseudo-racial democracy" of the Reconstructionist period, educator Booker T. Washington and intellectual leader W. E. B. Dubois emerged as prominent black spokesmen. A brief bibliography is included. (FMW)

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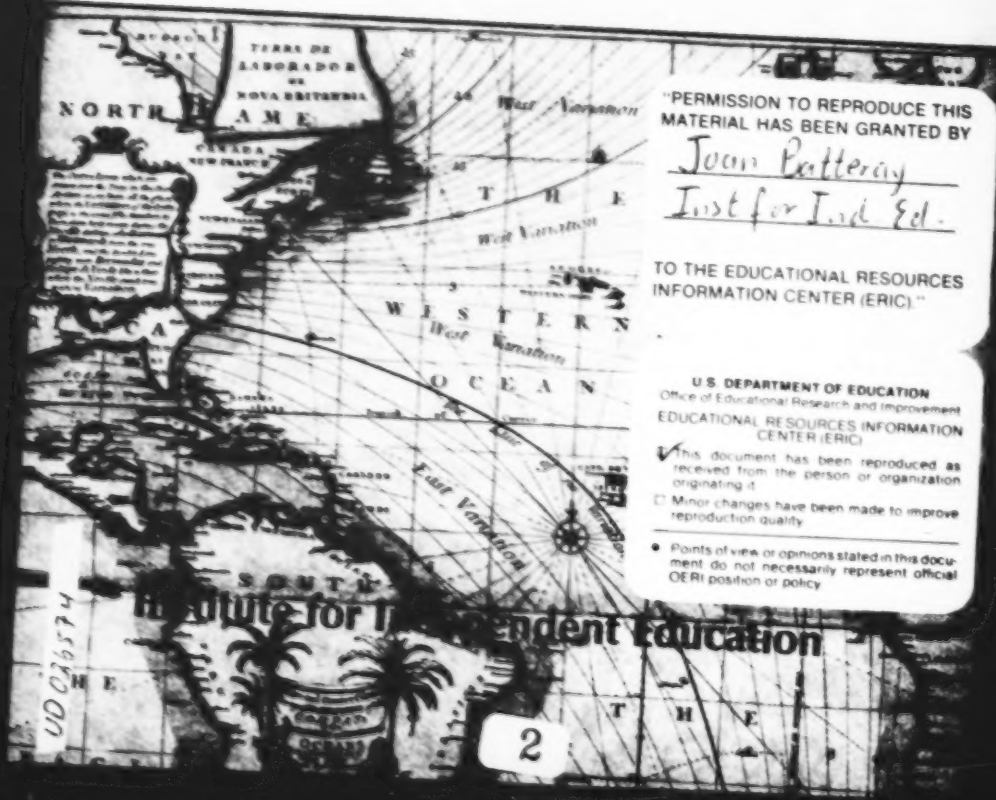
Essays and Policy Studies

Africans Away from Home

John Henrik Clarke



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Essays on Liberty

This is one of several of essays and policy studies intended for policymakers, researchers, teachers, administrators, parents, students and others who are interested in the education of African-American, Hispanic-American, American-Indian and Asian-American youth.

The entire series of essays and policy studies explores the cultural roots and historical legacies of these various groups. It probes what it means to be independent and to enjoy that liberty. It discusses the general context of learning in schools of all types, and it lays the foundation for determining what must be done to enhance American education. It is designed to stimulate readers to consider why independent schools are important and what role they should have in America's educational system.

JOHN HENRIK CLARKE, D.H.L., is Professor Emeritus at Hunter College, New York, NY.

COVER: Excerpt from a chart developed in 1700 by Edmund Halley, the English astronomer and geographer. It was used by navigators on ships bringing Africans to the Americas. *(Source: U.S. Library of Congress)*

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Africans Away from Home

John Henrik Clarke

Africans who were brought against their will across the Atlantic never fully adjusted to slavery or accepted it as something that was inevitable. Instead, they pursued liberty under trying and seemingly impossible conditions, and their search continued throughout the entire period of their enslavement.

The real fight for liberty by these Africans started on the shores of Africa and in the slave holding forts along the West African coast. As many slaves were forced onto the slave ships, they picked up a handful of African dirt and forced it into their mouths. They were determined to take some of their homeland with them as they went into forced exile.

This pursuit of liberty and lost nationhood continued in the form of revolts on slave ships. During exercise periods, when Africans were brought on deck for air, many of them jumped overboard. The masters of the slave ships also discovered that some of the slaves had committed suicide, while some Africans were killed when they attempted to assault those who enslaved them on the ships.

This spirit of revolt was nurtured throughout slavery and took many forms wherever slaves were found, whether in South America, in the Caribbean, or in the United States.

South America and the Caribbean

In South America the slave revolts were most successful in Brazil and other areas where there were large areas of thick forest and wooded hills. Many Africans escaped the auction blocks and headed for the forests and hills where they were able to form separate African communities. These escaped Africans were later referred to as 'Maroons.'

The large number of Africans imported into Brazil came from diverse tribes in Africa, but, under the pressure of slavery, they

managed to settle their cultural differences and work together for liberty. Scattered communities of these escaped Africans existed throughout the Americas, not only in the swamps and forests of Brazil but also in the hills of Haiti and Jamaica in the Caribbean.

Africans in Brazil established two separate states, Bahia and Palmares. The slaves in Bahia surrendered under military pressure from the Portuguese. However, Palmares existed for at least 110 years, until 1695. It remained a rough-hewn African republic, until Portuguese and other Europeans living on the edge of Palmares helped the Portuguese government lead a superior military force to the area and destroyed the state. The heroic stand these Africans took in defense of their state is a proud page in the story of how Africans pursued liberty away from home.

In other parts of South America, in the countries now called Guyana and Surinam, there was an uprising in the area of Berbice that became known as the Berbice revolt. These revolts in Guyana and in Surinam were referred to as the "Bush Negro" rebellions. The important thing about the revolts mentioned here is that they occurred before the American Revolution. Therefore, these Africans in the Americas led the *first* revolts against tyranny in the New World.

The Caribbean Islands, like the plantations of South America, were incubators for revolts by slaves pursuing liberty in the New World. Because of the need for slave labor in the plantation system and the economic recovery of Europe after 1492, slavery was most harsh on islands that produced the largest economic benefits for Europeans. The first revolt of African slaves, where the record is clear, occurred in Cuba in 1527, but most of the organized revolts started on the islands of Haiti and Jamaica.

The greatest Caribbean revolts in pursuit of liberty occurred in Jamaica, prior to the Haitian Revolution. The Jamaicans fought longer and harder than the Haitians, but they failed to gain their independence because the British had a small internal military force in Jamaica. There were also numerous mulattoes who had not decided where their loyalties lay. The mulattoes did not join in the African revolt because they assumed that they would be fighting against their White fathers. The Africans in Haiti were able to gain their independence and establish a free state because France, which had many other military entanglements, did not have sufficient able troops to send to Haiti and put down a revolt.

The South American and Caribbean revolts in pursuit of liberty were successful partly for reasons of geography but more importantly because of African cultural continuity. This phenomenon is best understood by considering briefly the buying customs of the British slave masters in South America and the Caribbean. They generally bought slaves in large lots and kept the lots together. Therefore, many Africans who were captured in the same general area in West Africa maintained their African religion, language, and, in a general sense, their cultural continuity. In the United States, however, slaves were generally bought in small lots and resold before the end of the week. Families and cultural continuity were broken to such an extent that often, after a month in the United States, many slaves could not even identify other slaves who arrived with them on the same boat.

The conditions of slavery were not less brutal in South America or in the Caribbean than they were in the United States, but greater cultural continuity was maintained. It was this factor that facilitated the slave revolts in the West Indies and in South America. Organized African resistance to conditions in these areas occurred with a greater consistency, due to the fact that the slaves who were house servants still had loyalty to the other slaves who were field workers.

The revolts by slaves in South America and the Caribbean started 100 years before 1619, when slaves formally arrived in the British colony that became known as the United States, and before the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620.

Early Years in The United States

In the United States, the African pursuit of liberty differed in various parts of the country, depending on conditions at the respective plantations, relationships forged with other ethnic groups, the impact of the weather, and contacts with Africans from the Caribbean.

Earliest Plantations

The African slaves who arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 were not chattel slaves, in the general sense; they were indentured servants. Lerone Bennett has explained very graphically in the early chapters of his book, *The Shaping of Black America*, the conditions under which these early arrivals lived. He explains

that most of the first indentured servants and those that arrived for the next 100 years were White. He also explains that Africans could have inherited their chains from the Indians and poor Whites, both of whom were indentured servants in large numbers before the arrival of Africans.

White and Indian Allies

The years between 1619 and 1776 sometimes have been referred to as the lost or neglected years in the history of slavery in the United States. During this period, many Whites worked their way out of indenture, some joined the slave system, and still others opposed it. The idea of prejudice based solely on color had not crystallized in the minds of the poor Whites, who had no vested interest in the maintenance of the slave system. White indentured servants and many other poor Whites generally had no derogatory attitude towards the Africans. Some of them worked side-by-side on the same farms. There are also many recorded incidents where indentured Whites joined Africans in revolt against the conditions of slavery and in their mutual pursuit of liberty.

Bennett further tells us that Africans in pursuit of liberty often escaped and lived among the indigenous Americans, known as Indians. The best known incident of this nature occurred in the Everglades of Florida.

At one period in history, over half the army of the Seminole Indians consisted of escaped African slaves. There were so many Africans in the ranks of the Indian army that one military officer fighting the Indians, observing that most of the Indian army were escaped slaves, remarked that this was no longer an "Indian" war.

This condition existed throughout the Seminole Wars. The heroic stands that Indians and slaves made together, as allies during the formative years of the United States and in what is referred to as the Seminole Wars, is still another chapter in the pursuit of liberty by Africans in America.

New England Weather

The pursuit of liberty differed in New England because of the weather. Many of the slaves there worked in industry and also worked as carpenters, plasterers, and ships' caulkers. The winters in New England are long, and therefore there was no need for Africans to labor all year round as slaves in these industries.

The value of the slave differed appreciably in the New England states from those on southern plantations. In New England, many slaves bought their liberty, some escaped into Canada through the underground railroad, and others were freed by Quakers who no longer believed in the slave system. As a result, a small contingent of African freedmen began to emerge in New England.

Caribbean Influences

Freedmen had already emerged in the Caribbean, mainly on the island of Jamaica. On the eve of the American Revolution these Africans began to make contact with Africans in North America, unifying their efforts in pursuit of liberty for all Africans away from home. This could have been the first inkling of the concept that would later be identified as Pan-Africanism.

This was also the period when Prince Hall, a former slave from Barbados, now a free man, came to the New England colony and joined forces with the Black American freedmen. He was told that if he owned property, he would get consideration as a nab, so he bought property. This did not appreciably change his condition or that of other Blacks. He was told that ministers got respect, so he became a minister, but this did not change his condition either.

Finally Prince Hall decided to start a fraternal organization. He requested a charter from the British but was turned down. A Scottish and Irish regiment which was serving under the British gave him an authentic charter for the organization now referred to as the Masons. Prince Hall then established the first Black masonic order in the United States, calling his organization the African Lodge. He used this order to continue the African pursuit of liberty, calling attention to the condition of Africans still not free. In New England, the African Lodge served as the inspiration for the beginning of other independent Black organizations. Its success also led eventually to the establishment of an independent Black church, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, under the leadership of Richard Allen.

Continued collaboration between Caribbean freedmen and Black American free men in New England created an atmosphere that encouraged slaves in the South to escape, knowing that there were people to protect them if they suceeded. This made it possible for Frederick Douglass, who had the will to escape from slavery, to develop his talents and emerge as a national leader.

Protests in Word and Deed

The pursuit of liberty by Africans in the United States took several different forms. It began with questions they asked about contradictions inherent in proclaiming a revolution, announcing liberty and justice for all, but not including Black Americans.

The radical Black ministry that began to emerge during the first half of the 19th century, filled with ideas about the American revolution, saw these contradictions and set in motion several massive slave revolts. There was the Gabriel Prosser revolt in 1800, the Denmark Vesey revolt in 1822, and the best known of all, the Nat Turner revolt in Virginia that occurred in 1831.

Also during the first half of the 19th century a literature of protest and revolt had emerged in such Black edited publications as *Freedom's Journal*, a newspaper operated by Frederick Douglass called *The North Star* and later *Douglass' Monthly*. Douglass was a most able leader and the most eloquent voice of the African people's pursuit of liberty. In 1829 David Walker issued his famous *Appeal To The Colored People of The World* summoning them to revolt against their condition. There were also great figures like Martin Delaney, Henry Highland Garnet, Samuel Ringgold Ward and others who emerged in this period.

The continuous attacks by Black Abolitionists on the eve of the Civil War focused on slavery and the conditions of slavery, and they created a great deal of anti-slavery sentiments. During the Civil War, Black Americans fought in large numbers on the side of the North, especially the famous Black regiment which consisted mainly of New England Blacks. After the Civil War, however, Africans had to pursue liberty in a different manner.

Renewed Fight for Liberty

The Emancipation Proclamation created official freedom for a large number of Blacks, but no immediate protection for that freedom. Some old troubles ended while new troubles began.

Large numbers of Whites decided that Blacks would not pursue liberty peacefully. The attitudes of slavery still lingered in the minds of many Whites, both in the North and in the South. This pseudo-racial democracy continued for approximately 11 years, before the political "horse-trading" between the South and the North crystallized during the presidential campaign of 1874-75.

This point marked the beginning of the period that could be called the betrayal of the era known as "Reconstruction."

During the last twenty-five years of the 19th century, Blacks in the United States were forced to begin again their fight in pursuit of liberty. Many Blacks who had been duly elected to public office were physically barred from entering some of the legislative halls in the states. The political gains of the Reconstruction era were lost. The late Professor Rayford Logan, formerly of Howard University, referred to this period as the "nadir" — symbolically the hour of our greatest depression.

African cultural continuity was more difficult to sustain in the United States at this point than it was in the Caribbean because African religions and the use of the drum were outlawed. Nevertheless, its impact could be seen in the work of the American Colonization Society and early back-to-Africa movements, such as the Chief Sam movements in Oklahoma during the 1870s and the movements led by Bishop Turner.

Near the end of the 19th century, Whites who had shown an interest in the cause of Blacks grew tired of trying to communicate with a multiplicity of leaders. Finally White editorial writers and philanthropists of good will annointed a man they could accept as leader. His name was Booker T. Washington. As the founder of Tuskegee Institute, Washington came to public attention after his speech at the Atlanta Cotton Exhibition, which some regarded as an attempt to make peace with both the North and the South.

As an educator, he was misunderstood then, and he is misunderstood now. Many people regarded his political views as weak, but he was a great and an imaginative educator who taught and practiced self-reliance. They failed to assess properly his views and methods, which were both strong and beneficial to Black people in the United States and abroad.

This was the period when W.E.B. DuBois emerged as one of the finest intellects of African descent produced in the entire western world. It was also the period of Black radical journalists, such as T. Thomas Fortune and William Monroe Trotter.

The African movement in pursuit of liberty has had a worldwide influence. In the Caribbean, newly freed Africans were discovering the feeling of their emancipation, just as we had discovered the feeling of ours. In Africa, colonial wars were

being waged as they had been waged for nearly 100 years, and Africans were discovering the feeling of their emancipation, just as we had discovered the feeling of ours. In fact, the pursuit of liberty by African people all over the world has brought us fighting, hoping and bleeding into the 20th century.

The fight in the pursuit of liberty to which I have referred is only a preface. The rest of the story is a current event.

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